

Bahamian delegation visits Rhode Island



A 15-member Bahamian economic, trade, tourism and law enforcement delegation visited Rhode Island August 7-12 as part of the ongoing U.S. National Guard State Partnership Program with the Bahamas. The visit represented a return visit for the Bahamian group following the visit to Nassau in May by a seven-member business development delegation from Rhode Island.

The delegation included Deputy Commissioner of Police, Uniform Branch Marvin Dames, AG Commander Royal Bahamas Defense Force, Samuel Evans, and Director, National Emergency Management Agency, Carl Smith. The Bahamas Development Bank was represented by Chairman Darron Cash, Deputy General Manager Anthony Woodside, Manager, Business Development, Dale McHardy, and Assistant Manager, Business Development, Andrew Stanford. Ministry of Tourism participants included Director, Events Strategy and Special Events, Janet Johnson and Raymond Harrison, Visitor Experience Unit. The delegation also included the Director, Antiquities, Monuments and Museums Corporation, Dr. Keith Tinker and Chamber of Commerce representatives Senator Tanya Wright, past President, Executive Director Philip Simon, and Fritz Stubbs.

The highlight of the visit was a courtesy call on Governor Donald Carcieri at the State House Building. During the visit, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Bahamas Development Bank, the Bahamas Chamber of Commerce, and the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation was concluded. Signatories included Chairman of The Bahamas Development Bank, Darron Cash; Executive Director, Bahamas Chamber of Commerce, Philip Simon, and Treasurer of the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation, and Keith Stokes, representing the Rhode Island Economic Development Association. The Memorandum will serve as a vehicle to foster economic development, scientific advancement and business exchanges between Rhode Island and The Bahamas. The three agencies have initially agreed to facilitate and promote joint economic cooperation in the areas of financial services, tourism, education, micro, small and medium business support, training, and advice. This cooperation will also include the promotion of trade and investment and will serve to build on the existing partnership established earlier this year with the signing of a separate Memorandum of Understanding between The College of The Bahamas and the University of Rhode Island. The newly signed memorandum will seek to promote research and academic exchange between educational institutions in the Bahamas and Rhode Island, and will engage the public and private sectors in developing mutually beneficial economic relationships.

While in Rhode Island, the economic group had an opportunity to see how Rhode Island has preserved and developed its culture and historic resources to promote tourism. Since The Bahamas and Rhode Island share many similarities including a common ancestral heritage, coastal setting, and a tourism-based economy, the cityscape in Newport bore an uncanny resemblance to locations in Nassau. The layout of Nassau and Newport are similar because both cities were planned by British colonists who settled in Newport in 1639 and The Bahamas in 1647.

Mark Brouder, Deputy Director of Tourism at the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation, gave the delegation a guided tour of several prominent historical locations between Providence and Newport, Rhode Island, including the Johnson and Wales Culinary Museum and home of a social studies concept – Exchange City – an actual town where schools are invited to use this hands on experience as an interactive teaching tool to give children from grades 5-9 a glimpse into the workings of running a business.

Mr. Brouder also provided the Bahamian visitors with an account of how Providence restored its derelict downtown area to the bustling, picturesque robust city it is today. The group toured Barrington, Warren and the majestic Blithewold Mansion in Bristol, culminating in an authentic Rhode Island clambake. The delegation traveled to Newport by ferry and viewed a number historic mansions on Newport's Ocean Drive and toured The Breakers"-- a 70-room seaside estate -- formerly the summer cottage of the famous Vanderbilt family. They then toured downtown Newport's Colony House, Wanton Hazard House, Redwood Library, and Touro Synagogue where Keith Stokes, President of the Newport Chamber of Commerce, recounted the religious history of Rhode Island. They were also hosted to a "medieval" banquet at the "haunted" Belcourt Castle.

Delegation members gained valuable insights into how Rhode Island packaged its cultural and historic features that they believed could be applied within The Bahamas. Through the ongoing State Partnership Program, delegation members will maintain contact with Rhode Island agency representatives to develop projects for their companies that could enhance business and the tourism product in The Bahamas.

Launched in December 2005 the Rhode Island National Guard State Partnership with the Bahamas has generated a series of cooperative initiatives ranging from disaster preparedness to business cooperation and university partnerships. The U.S. Embassy's 2007 celebration of American independence at Liberty Overlook featured fine Rhode Island foods and wines provided by some of the companies that have participated in the State Partnership Program. In 2006 the program provided training for Bahamian prison guards, police investigators, and firefighters and cooperation in disaster preparedness and emergency management.

Photo Caption: Members of the Bahamian delegation sign Memorandum of Understanding between the Bahamas Development Bank, the Bahamas Chamber of

Commerce and the Rhode Island Economic Development. From left: Major Mike Manning, Coordinator of the Rhode Island State Partnership Program; Major General Robert Bray, Philip Simon, Executive Director, Bahamas Chamber of Commerce; Darron Cash, Chairman, Bahamas Development Bank; Keith Stokes, Treasurer of the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation; Maureen Mezi, Rhode Island Economic Corporation and Anne Marie Bain, Economic Commercial Assistant, U.S. Embassy.